NEWS ANALYSIS: 1-0347 MARCH 11, 1976.
JOHN ALBERT

THE AMERICAN DEBATE ON DEFENSE

ANNCR: THE FORD ADMINISTRATION HAS ASKED CONGRESS FOR MAJOR INCREASES IN THE DEFENSE BUDGET FOR THE COMING YEAR. THIS FACT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE NATIONAL DEBATE ON AMERICA'S DEFENSE WHICH IS INCREASING IN INTENSITY IN THIS ELECTION YEAR. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS:

VOICE: THE FORD ADMINISTRATION'S DEFENSE POLICIES ARE UNDER ATTACK FOR TWO COMPLETELY DIFFERENT REASONS. ON THE ONE HAND THERE ARE CRITICS IN CONGRESS WHO SERIOUSLY DOUBT THE NEED FOR A DEFENSE BUDGET AS LARGE AS IS BEING REQUESTED THIS YEAR. AND THESE CRITICS ALSO EXPRESS DOUBTS ABOUT THE INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES PRESENTED TO THEM ON SOVIET MILITARY EXPENDITURES.

ON THE OTHER HAND, OPPONENTS OF PRESIDENT FORD IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN, NOTABLY FORMER GOVERNOR REAGAN AMONG THE REPUBLICANS AND SENATOR JACKSON AMONG THE DEMOCRATS, CHARGE THAT DURING PRESIDENT FORD'S TERM IN OFFICE THE UNITED STATES HAS CONSISTENTLY LOST GROUND IN ATTEMPTING TO MAINTAIN PARITY WITH THE SOVIET UNION IN THE MILITARY FIELD AND HAS SIGNED AGREEMENTS ON STRATEGIC WEAPONS LIMITATION WHICH HAVE TENDED TO FAVOR THE SOVIET ARMS BUILDUP.

IN REACTING TO BOTH ARGUMENTS, PRESIDENT FORD, SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER AND SECRETARY OF DEFENSE RUMSFELD MAKE THESE POINTS. THEY MAINTAIN THAT, THE UNITED STATES CLEARLY HAS A ROUGH EQUIVALENCE WITH THE SOVIET UNION IN STRATEGIC WEAPONS; IF NOT IN EVERY CATEGORY, NEVERTHELESS IN OVERALL STRENGTH. THE SOVIET ADVANTAGE IN HEAVY MISSILES AND NUMBERS OF DELIVERY VEHICLES IS MADE UP WITH BETTER TECHNOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN ARSENAL, AS FAR AS ACCURACY, RELIABILITY AND NUMBERS OF MULTIPLE WARHEADS IS CONCERNED. IN FACT, THEY POINT OUT,

THAT IN THE FOUR YEARS SINCE THE SALT ONE AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED, THE U.S. LEAD IN WARHEADS HAS ACTUALLY INCREASED. IT IS NOW 8,500 TO 2,800, OR THREE-TO-ONE.

ADMINISTRATION SPOKESMEN CONCEDE THAT IT IS THE TREND IN SOVIET ARMS EXPENDITURES, OBSERVED OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, WHICH CAUSES SERIOUS CONCERN. IF THE PACE OF SOVIET RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE STRATEGIC WEAPONS FIELD WERE TO CONTINUE AND WITHOUT AMERICAN COUNTER MEASURES, THEN, INDEED, THE UNITED STATES COULD IN A PERIOD OF SEVERAL YEARS FALL INTO A POSITION OF INFERIORITY TO THE SOVIET MILITARY CAPABILITIES. (OPT) BY THE SAME TOKEN, CONTINUED INCREASES IN CONVENTIONAL MILITARY STRENGTH OF THE SOVIET UNION, AND PARTICULARLY IN ITS NAVAL POWER, COULD, WITHOUT ADEQUATE AMERICAN IMPROVEMENTS CREATE A MAJOR IMBALANCE IN CONVENTIONAL FORCES. THIS WOULD MEAN THAT IN THE CASE OF CONFLICT THE UNITED STATES MIGHT BE FACED WITH THE DIFFICULT DECISION OF RESORTING TO NUCLEAR WEAPONS TO PREVENT ITS FORCES AND THOSE OF ITS ALLIES FROM BEING OVERRUN. (END OPT)

FAR FROM HAVING EXAGGERATED THE PACE OF SOVIET ARMAMENT, THE FORD ADMINISTRATION ARGUES, AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES HAVE IN THE PAST CONSISTENTLY UNDERRATED SOVIET MILITARY EXPENDITURES IN RELATION TO THE TOTAL BUDGET. ONE MAY QUIBBLE ABOUT THE VALUE OF DOLLAR COMPARISONS IN THESE ESTIMATES -- THEY SAY -- BUT THE OVERALL PICTURE IS TOO CLEAR TO BE OVERLOOKED.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD BELIEVES THAT HE IS MAKING PROGRESS IN CONVINCING THE CONGRESS OF THE NEED TO INCREASE THE AMERICAN DEFENSE BUDGET OVER A NUMBER OF YEARS, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER A NEW SALT AGREEMENT CAN BE NEGOTIATED. IN RESPONSE TO THOSE CRITICS WHO CHARGE THAT THE FORD ADMINISTRATION HAS NOT BEEN DOING ENOUGH TO MAINTAIN THE STRATEGIC BALANCE WITH THE SOVIET UNION, PRESIDENT FORD AND HIS SPOKESMEN POINT OUT THAT THE FINAL DECISION ON DEFENSE EXPENDITURES LIES WITH

CONGRESS AND ITS DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY, AND NOT WITH THE ADMINISTRATION. AS FOR THE SALT TWO AGREEMENT, SECRETARY KISSINGER HAS MADE CLEAR THAT THE ADMINISTRATION IS NOT TRYING TO FINISH NEGOTIATIONS THIS YEAR BECAUSE OF THE U.S. ELECTION. "IF WE CANNOT GET THE RIGHT TERMS THIS YEAR," HE SAID IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, "WE WILL NOT SETTLE IT THIS YEAR. THE BALL IS NOW IN THE SOVIET COURT. THE PACE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS NOW DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE SOVIET RESPONSE."

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